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ABSTRACT

This booklet is a basic introduction to the people, history, and culture of Haiti, designed primarily for service providers and others assisting refugees in their new communities in the United States. Haitians have been arriving in the United States since the 1770s, but recent immigration can be regarded as a series of waves, each associated with a period of repression in Haiti. The unique history of the country has created a unique culture full of contradictions. The Haitian immigrant cannot be understood without reference to the country's complicated history and culture. Although there has been little formal education for the majority of Haitians, those who have received formal education have been taught in a system very different from that of the United States and face many adjustments to schooling as well as to language. An introduction to Haitian Creole is provided. In the United States, Haitians face all the problems other poor communities face, but they will overcome their difficulties just as other groups have. (Contains 33 references.) (SLD)

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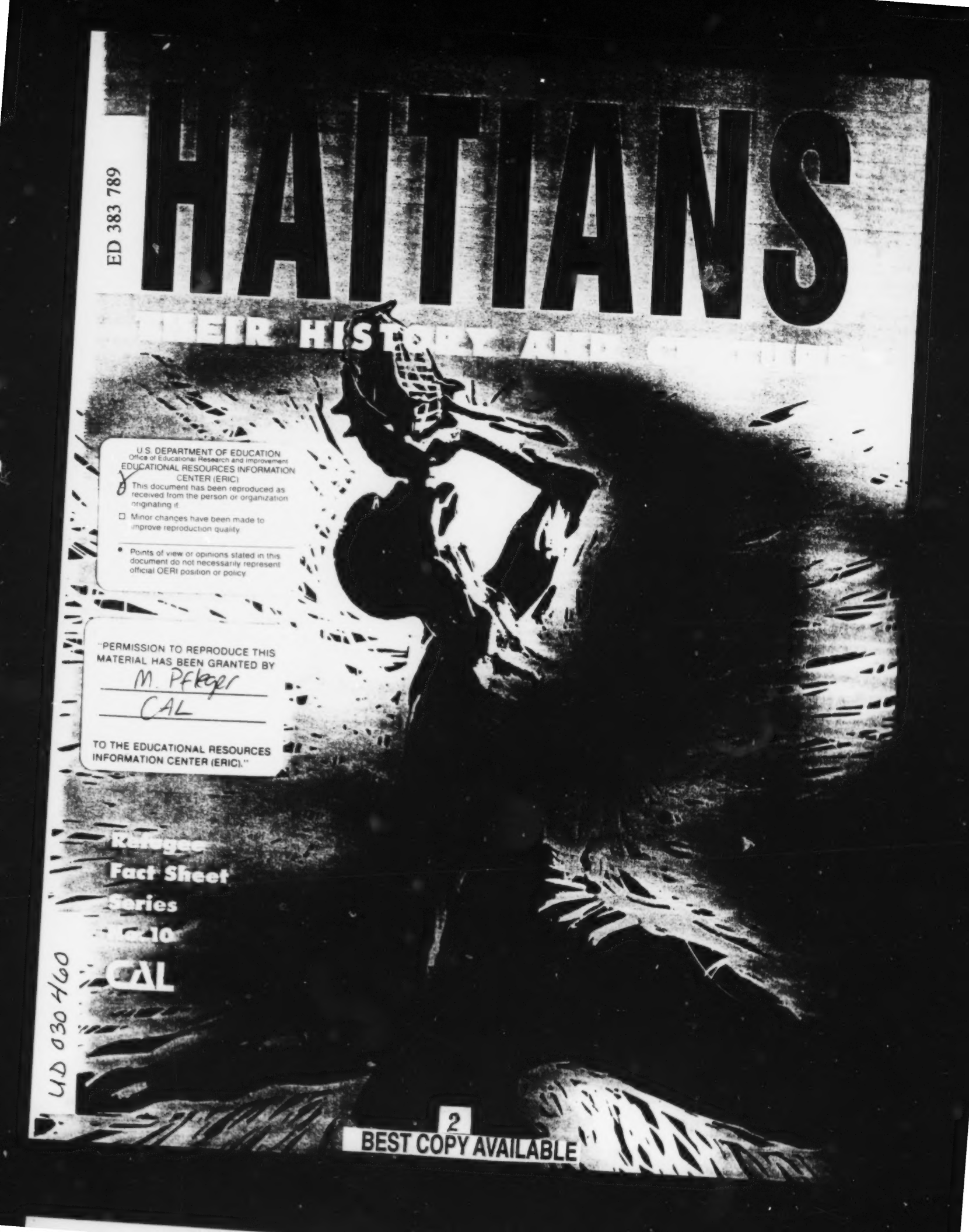
HAITIANS

THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE



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The Haitians

THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE

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with
Féquière Vilsaint and Gepsie Morisset-Métellus

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Cover: Statue of the Unknown Maroon, located near the Presidential Palace in Port-au-Prince
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Preface

This booklet is a basic introduction to the people, history, and culture of Haiti. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting refugees in their new communities in the United States.

The principal writer is Michele Burtoff Civan, a linguist and teacher trainer with many years of experience in the field of refugee education. In 1985, she conducted a study on the relationship between Haitian Creole literacy and ESL proficiency among adult Haitians. Two Haitian-Americans, Gepsie Morisset-Métellus and Féquière Vilsaint, also contributed to this fact sheet. Ms. Métellus is an Education Specialist in the Office of Multicultural Programs/ Alternative Education, Dade County (Florida) Public Schools. Mr. Vilsaint develops Haitian Creole educational materials and is the Director of EducaVision, a Haitian Creole resource center in Temple Terrace, Florida.

Many people read and commented on drafts of the manuscript. In particular, we would like to thank: Edwidge Crevecoeur-Bryant of the Multicultural Resource Center at Florida Atlantic University in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; Dr. Georges Fouron, Associate Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the State University of New York, Stonybrook; Dora Johnson, Program Associate at the Center for Applied Linguistics; Dr. Terry Karl, Director of the Center for Latin American Studies, Stanford University; and Brunson McKinley, Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration. We would also like to thank Sarah Neal of the Center for Applied Linguistics for her valuable copyediting and proofreading assistance.

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Donald A. Ranard, Editor

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Introduction

Haitians began arriving on U.S. shores long before the widely publicized boat people crisis of the early 1980s. In fact, historians have documented a Haitian presence as early as the 1770s when a contingent of Haitian soldiers fought in the American Revolutionary War. During the same period, maroons—slaves who had escaped the oppressive plantation system—could be found in New York, New Orleans, and other U.S. cities. Individuals of Haitian descent who have made contributions to the United States include Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, the first non-Indian to settle Chicago; John James Audubon, the naturalist; and Pierre Toussaint, a former slave who is under consideration by the Vatican for canonization as a saint for his humanitarian work in New York.

Recent immigration to the United States can be viewed in terms of specific "waves," each wave associated with a wave of repression within Haiti.

Recent immigration to the United States can be viewed in terms of specific "waves," each wave associated with a wave of repression within Haiti. The first wave began in 1957 following Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier's rise to power. These immigrants were members of the well-educated political and economic elite. Planning to return to Haiti after the ouster of Duvalier, they did not realize that their flight would forever affect the development of Haiti by depriving the country of its human resources. The next wave, in the late 1960s, coincided with the civil rights movement in the United States. Other factors—terrorist tactics of the Duvalier government, a more liberal U.S. immigration policy, and the need of U.S. companies to replenish a labor force drained by the Vietnam War—contributed to the influx of Haitians into the United States. For the most part, this wave of immigrants comprised skilled people from the middle and lower middle classes.

In 1971, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier's smooth transition to power set the stage for another wave of immigration. Repression and corruption remained pervasive; an infusion of American capital into Haiti to revitalize the economy only served to improve the lot of the powerful in Port-au-Prince, not the poor in the heavily populated rural areas. A mass exodus of poor peasants and urban dwellers began in the late 1970s and continued into the early 1980s. Largely uneducated and with little or no literacy, these people became known as the Haitian "boat people." The boat people phenomenon continued after the younger Duvalier's ouster in 1986, with an increasing number of Haitians fleeing as the terror and violence intensified prior to the 1987 elections. With the election of Aristide in 1990, the flow of

refugees briefly stemmed; in fact, there was some evidence of voluntary repatriation. However, with the coup that forced Aristide into exile, the terror, and thus the exodus of refugees to the United States, resumed.

The Land

Haiti occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola, known in Spanish as *La Isla Española;* the Dominican Republic makes up the rest of the island. Approximately 700 miles southeast of Florida, the island is located between the islands of Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. The name Haiti derives from the word *ayti* or *hayti*, which in the indigenous Taino/Arawak Indian language means "mountainous."

The name Haiti derives from the word ayti *or* hayti, *which in the indigenous Taino/Arawak Indian language means "mountainous."*

At 10,000 square miles, Haiti is approximately the size of Maryland. Five mountain ranges divide the country into northern, central, and southern regions. Haiti is shaped like a horseshoe on its side, with northern and southern peninsulas; the Île de la Gonâve is located between the peninsulas.

Haiti's climate is generally tropical, both hot and humid. There are two rainy seasons: April through June and August through mid-November. Annual rainfall averages 56–80 inches, with very uneven distribution. Rainfall is heaviest in the southern peninsula and parts of the northern mountains, while the western coast is relatively dry. Temperatures in the summer vary from 85–95° F in the coastal lowlands to 65–70° F in the interior highlands.

Haiti was once covered with virgin forests, but much of the natural vegetation has been destroyed by agriculture, grazing, and exploitation of timber. Indeed, Haiti is in an alarming state of environmental devastation due to deforestation and soil erosion. Only 11% of the land is arable, and that figure is declining at a rapid rate. Haiti is in the process of becoming a desert. Viewed from the air, the state of Haiti's environment presents a harsh contrast to the Dominican Republic.

For the moment, however, pines, ferns, orchids, and other tropical trees and flowers can still be found. But the deterioration of natural vegetation has affected wildlife, which has lost its habitat. Once-common wild boars, guinea fowls, and wild ducks are now scarce, though caimans, flamingos, egrets, and small tropical birds can still be seen.

The People

The population of Haiti was estimated at 5,590,000 in 1990. Almost all Haitians are descendents of the approximately half a million enslaved West Africans who won their freedom from France in 1804, making Haiti the world's first modern black republic. The population is 95% black, with the remaining 5% consisting mostly of mulattos, traditionally the elite ruling class. Whites—mostly British, American, and French—make up a very small minority. The two national languages are French and Haitian Creole, but fluency in French carries a much higher status.

More than two-thirds of the population live in rural areas, although this pattern has been changing in recent years. Roughly two-thirds of the labor force work in agriculture; however, deforestation, land erosion, and a declining economy have forced an increasing number of peasants to migrate to the cities or abroad. (A large number of Haitians work in the Dominican Republic as *braceros*, under near slave-like conditions.) Port-au-Prince, the capital, has a population of approximately one million people, more than six times the population of Cap-Haïtien, the second major city. Other major towns are Gonaïves, Les Cayes, and Jacmel.

Haiti's unique history has created a unique culture that is different from the Spanish Caribbean cultures and is dualistic in nature: European vs. African, French vs. Creole, mulatto elites vs. the black masses, urban vs. rural, Christianity vs. Voodoo, etc.

The penetration of transnational companies into the Haitian economy has also contributed to the influx of peasants into Port-au-Prince. These changing demographics have caused both urban problems and social changes. While peasants have traditionally depended on the extended family and cooperative labor to survive, urban slum dwelling has weakened this aspect of the social fabric.

Haiti's unique history has created a unique culture that is different from the Spanish Caribbean cultures and is dualistic in nature: European vs. African, French vs. Creole, mulatto elites vs. the black masses, urban vs. rural, Christianity vs. Voodoo, etc. One would be hard-pressed to understand present-day Haitian society without some knowledge of the historically important role of color and class in shaping social norms and expectations. The color of a Haitian's skin, the languages he commands, and the work that he does are all related and have always been of utmost importance in assigning him to the appropriate class. But the recent emergence of a politically-significant middle class, however unstable, is forcing Haiti to come to terms with what is truly "Haitian."

The Economy

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and among the twenty-five poorest in the world. Per capita income, reported as $377 in 1985, dropped to $330 in 1987. The elite, a very small percentage of the population, earn over 60% of the national income, while unemployment ranges from 30% to 70%.

Although in decline since the 1950s, agriculture remains the mainstay of Haiti's economy. Coffee is the number-one cash crop; most peasants grow it alongside other food crops. Other cash crops include sugar, cotton, cocoa, and essential oils. To supplement food and grain imports, food crops are also grown. These consist of corn, rice, beans, bananas, mangoes, avocados, and various other tropical fruits and vegetables.

In 1987, the agricultural sector employed 66% of the labor force and accounted for 35% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Services employed 23% of the labor force and accounted for 42% of the GDP, while industry employed only 6% of the labor force and accounted for 23% of the GDP. Based on these statistics, Haiti is the most agrarian and least industrial country in the Western Hemisphere.

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Like many other islands in the Caribbean, Haiti has limited mineral resources. Bauxite, at one time the country's second leading export, was mined extensively by the Reynolds Metal Company to extract aluminum, but the declining metal content of the ore, among other things, forced the mine to close in 1983. Other mineral resources, such as gold and copper, are largely undeveloped.

In recent years, there has been a precipitous decline in agriculture. One reason for this decline is Haiti's policy on land tenure. Perhaps as a backlash to the colonial slave-holding system, large plantations were parceled into smaller plots to be worked by individuals and families. While increasing individual freedom and personal stability, this policy also contributed to lower output and fewer exports. Moreover, during the American occupation in the 1920s, many North American companies leased large tracts of land without establishing new farms or plantings. Left without land to cultivate, thousands of peasants were forced to the cities, where they became a source of cheap labor for foreign investors.

Another factor is Haiti's extreme state of deforestation. With wood fuels accounting for 75% of the country's energy consumption, deforestation of the once green, tree-covered land is now

critical; as of 1988 only about 2% of the country was tree-covered. The most direct effect of the destruction of trees has been soil erosion, which has made most of the land unsuitable for farming.

The fluctuation of prices for agricultural products in the world market has also contributed to the decline in agriculture. The fall in coffee prices as well as the fluctuation of sugar prices has had a major impact on agricultural production and planning.

As agriculture declined and poverty increased in the rural areas, many again flocked to the increasingly overcrowded city of Port-au-Prince in search of work. From the 1970s to the early 1980s, an abundance of cheap labor and favorable tariff rates drew U.S. assembly manufacturers to Haiti. During that time, the United States was criticized for not encouraging the development of transferable skills and for not supporting efforts to improve working conditions. Political instability and increased regional competition in the 1980s led to a decline in U.S. investments in Haiti.

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These factors, combined with political upheaval and the chaotic effects of the U.S. embargo, have currently brought the Haitian economy to a halt. Haitians are presently in a near-famine state, with close to a million people being fed by private aid agencies.

History

To a large extent, Haitian history has been shaped by foreign powers: first Spain, then France, and finally the United States. A rich, lush land with a strategic location, Haiti has often been viewed as a valuable piece of real estate.

The Colonial Era

When Columbus arrived on the island of Hispaniola on December 6, 1492, he was greeted by the Taino/Arawak Indians in their lush, green paradise. But the Spanish conquerors proved to be intolerant, abusive, and greedy; by 1550, the indigenous population had been almost entirely wiped out in violent uprisings or from inhumane forced labor and exposure to European diseases. In their quest for gold and other mineral riches, the Spaniards resorted to forcefully bringing West Africans to the New World to work as slaves.

Lacking economic potential, Santo Domingo, as Hispaniola

was known under Spanish rule, was soon condemned to neglect by the mother country, especially after the conquest of New Spain (Mexico) and the rich Incan kingdom in Peru. A Spanish presence was maintained, however, since Santo Domingo remained strategically important as the gateway to the Caribbean, from where many riches were shipped to the West.

Tortuga Island, off the northwest coast of Hispaniola, was the first French foothold. Reportedly expelled by the Spanish from the nearby island of St. Christopher (St. Kitts), the first French residents of Tortuga, joined by runaway slaves from Hispaniola, survived by curing meats, tanning hides, and pirating Spanish ships. They became known as "buccaneers," from the Arawak word for smoking meats.

It is to the slave-holding system that the origins of modern Haitian society, with its internal class and color conflicts, can be traced.

In 1659, Louis XIV commissioned the first permanent settlement on Tortuga. Settlers steadily encroached on the northwest part of Hispaniola; the French West India Company was established in 1664 to direct the expected commerce between France and the colony. In 1670, the French made Cap Français (present-day Cap Haïtien) their first major settlement on Hispaniola, taking advantage of its remoteness from the Spanish capital of Santo Domingo. The western part of the island was commonly referred to as Saint-Domingue, which became its official name after Spain relinquished the area to France in 1697 in the Treaty of Ryswick.

Relying on slavery, the French turned Saint-Domingue into one of its richest colonies. It produced nearly 60% of the world's coffee and about 40% of France's sugar imports. These products, in conjunction with cotton and indigo, accounted for approximately two-thirds of France's commercial interests abroad and about 40% of its foreign trade. Because of the high death rate among male slaves, France continually brought new slaves from Africa; the number of enslaved Africans "imported" by France totaled over half a million.

It is to the slave-holding system that the origins of modern Haitian society, with its internal class and color conflicts, can be traced. Many of the white French slavemasters kept African women as concubines, producing a small, elite mulatto population that constituted a class apart from (and above) the impoverished black majority. Colonial society consisted of three classes: *les blancs*, or white colonists; *les affranchis*, or free blacks (usually mulattos, called *gens de couleur*); and the black slaves. Discrimination and resentment were quite evident: the slaves were abused and

oppressed by all, while the privileged mulatto class was forbidden by law from marrying whites, practicing certain professions, wearing European clothes, and socializing with whites. However, the *affranchis* were not restricted from buying land and lending money, which enabled them to accumulate wealth.

In the mid-1700s, the number of runaway slaves, known as *maroons*, grew. From the safety of the mountains and forests, guerrilla bands attacked the white colonists. The colonial authorities, often with what was probably the forced help of the mulattos, were able to repel the attacks. But the seeds of rebellion were sown. Although the colonial system had made them wealthy, the mulattos desired equality with whites; so when the Colonial Assembly refused to grant suffrage to the land-owning, tax-paying mulattos, as required by the National Assembly in Paris, the mulattos also began to revolt.

It was the slave rebellion of 1791, led by a group of blacks, including Boukman, a maroon and voodoo priest, and Georges Biassou and his aide Toussaint Louverture, among others, which set the colony on the path to independence.

But it was the slave rebellion of 1791, led by a group of blacks, including Boukman, a maroon and voodoo priest, and Georges Biassou and his aide Toussaint Louverture, among others, which set the colony on the path to independence. The first gruesome attacks on northern settlements were answered by brutal reprisals elsewhere. Given this instability, the mulattos, under the leadership of Alexandre Pétion and others, also mounted attacks. The mulattos, desiring equality, were fighting the white colonists (Royalists), but not the whites of the new French Republic, who favored mulatto enfranchisement and the enforcement of human rights. The black (slave) forces were also split; some fought against the white colonists, while others fought both the whites and mulattos. Spain and Britain found these conditions quite favorable for intervention, and a very complex situation ensued. By 1793, black forces had joined the Commissioners of the French Republic to fight the white colonists in exchange for a promise of freedom. However, two black leaders of the revolution, one of them Biassou, were understandably suspicious of the French and refused to commit their forces; instead they pledged their allegiance to Spain. It was at this time that Toussaint Louverture, fighting for Spain, came to command his own forces and by the end of the year had control of north-central Saint-Domingue.

By 1794, Spain and Britain were on the verge of total victory when tropical disease began to take its toll on their troops. Toussaint Louverture, well-positioned, then made a crucial decision: he

pledged his support to France. Although promising freedom, Spain had shown no signs of moving in that direction, while Britain had actually reinstituted slavery in areas under its control. The French Republicans seemed the best choice for freedom. Thus in 1796, when Toussaint rescued the French commander from mulattos seeking to depose him, Toussaint was rewarded by being named Lieutenant Governor of Saint-Domingue. From this seat of power, he set out to ensure the continuation of an autonomous Saint-Domingue; he trusted neither foreigners nor mulattos, believing that only black leadership could protect the masses.

Although Toussaint tried to get mulatto support for his national project, the French tried to use the tension between the classes to their advantage. In the end, however, Toussaint won out, and by 1800 he was in command of all Hispaniola. He abolished slavery, but in order to ensure stability and economic survival, he reinstated the plantation system, using enforced contract labor, and became a military dictator. However, he had never formally declared independence from France, and his de facto autonomy was a thorn in the side of both the French and foreign slave-holding nations. In 1802, Napoleon sent forces to depose Toussaint, and again the French attempted to use the mulattos to attain victory. Forced into surrender, Toussaint was assured by the French that he could retire quietly. But a short time later, he was taken and exiled to France, where he died in prison. After this deception, the remaining Haitian forces, both black and mulatto, took up the battle cry against the French. Because French forces were mobilized on two fronts, fighting the Haitians as well as the British in Europe, Napoleon was unable to look after his interests in Louisiana. So, in 1803, he conceded to the U.S. purchase of Louisiana, dashing French ambitions in the West and enabling U.S. expansion. On January 1, 1804, Haiti declared independence, becoming the second independent nation (after the United States) in the West and the first free black republic in the world.

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Independence: Ruling a New Nation

Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a former slave who had commanded the black and mulatto forces at the close of the revolution, became the leader of the new nation. Knowing only military organization, he used the military to govern, beginning what became an established tradition of military rule.

The newly independent Haiti was not formally recognized by

the foreign Western powers. The United States, itself a slaveholding power, feared Haiti's example as a self-governing black republic, and thus withheld recognition until 1862, after the slaveholding south had seceded from the Union. Yet Haiti remained a covert trading partner, a fertile market for U.S. goods. In 1838, Haiti received its long-awaited recognition from France, after final payment of its "independence debt" (begun in 1825). But independence and recognition came at a high price; the payment of this debt emptied the treasury and placed the country in debt from which it never quite recovered.

It was also during the early years that the division of Haitian society into an elite class of the privileged few and the majority of poor farmers and laborers became entrenched. After the revolution, the collaboration of blacks and mulattos, which had won Haiti independence, turned to conflict. This oppressive class system, a legacy of French colonial rule, no longer cut so clearly across color lines, however. The black generals of the slave armies were also now competing for power and wealth. Thus, the early regimes of Haiti, whether led by mulattos or blacks, were dictatorial, keeping access to education, wealth, and power to themselves.

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From its beginning as an independent nation, then, Haiti was populated by two distinct societies. The elite lived in towns, controlling the government, military, and trade; they imitated a European lifestyle, using the French language for government, commercial affairs, and education. The peasants, on the other hand, lived in the *peyi andeyò*, or "the country outside." They farmed small plots of land, having little to do with the mechanisms of government and commerce. Although the peasants paid taxes, the government did little to improve conditions in rural areas. Conducting their lives according to African-based traditions and speaking only Creole, they were effectively disenfranchised and totally isolated. The majority peasant population remained outside the formal political, educational, and economic structure. This pattern of power, education, and wealth remains unchanged to this day.

The American Occupation

In 1915, Haitian political instability, American trade and investments, growing U.S. concern over German interests and influence in Haiti, and Haiti's strategic importance to the United States led to a U.S. invasion and occupation that would last almost 20 years.

U.S. intervention in smaller, neighboring nations to protect U.S. interests and promote regional stability was quite common during this period. The United States intervened in Colombia in 1903, in Cuba in 1906, in Honduras in 1907, in Nicaragua in 1912, and in Mexico in 1914. Following the Roosevelt Corollary of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States had declared itself the policeman of the Western Hemisphere, warning Europe to keep its distance.

On occasion, during revolutions, if a foreign debt went unpaid, the U.S. marines were sent in to seize the customhouses, generally the main source of revenue, and thus ensure that loans were paid off. Haiti, however, was a special case. Haiti was poor, but proud: Even though 80% of its national budget went to debt payment, and corruption and coups were common, Haiti had never defaulted on a debt.

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Nevertheless, by 1915 Haiti's political instability (in the previous 72-year period Haiti had experienced 102 revolts, revolutions, civil wars, and coups) and increasing German influence and control moved the United States closer to intervention. Of greatest concern to the United States was the fact that on the eve of World War I, Germany was said to control nearly 80% of Haiti's international trade. The United States also feared that Germany would establish a military base in Haiti, a turn of events that would have constituted a very real threat to the security of the newly-opened Panama Canal. Roger Farnham, an American banker with business interests in Haiti, became an adviser to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, further setting the stage for a U.S. intervention. But it was a bloody insurrection on July 26th, 1915, that provided the pretext for a U.S. invasion to establish order.

The United States . . . established the Haitian National Guard (Garde d'Haïti) . . . *which would later be harnessed by Duvalier to create a repressive regime that would last thirty years.*

Under the American occupation, Haitian figureheads were installed, but the United States had veto power over all government decisions, and the Marine Corps served as administrators in the provinces. The United States declared martial law, took control of Haiti's finances, and passed legislation permitting foreigners to own land in Haiti for the first time since 1804. It also established the Haitian National Guard *(Garde d'Haïti)*, Haiti's first professional military force, which would later be harnessed by Duvalier to create a repressive regime that would last thirty years.

The occupation imposed stability and order. Infrastructure and health conditions improved; roads, schools, and hospitals were built. These improvements were concentrated in Port-au-Prince,

however, ensuring its position as the economic center of the country. The racial prejudices and disdain felt by the American occupiers were obvious, and all Haitians, whether mulatto or black, were excluded from real positions of power in both the government and the new, U.S.-trained military force. Thus, any improvements forged by the U.S. occupation proved to be temporary.

When the United States withdrew from Haiti in 1934, the level of poverty and illiteracy remained unchanged. The United States left behind a legacy of anti-American feeling and a well-trained national military force. In the absence of any political or social institutions, the military remained the only cohesive institution in the country, becoming the only tool by which a government could rule.

Instead of improving the lives of the black majority, Duvalier set out to build a family dictatorship by changing the constitution to solidify his power.

Duvalier to the Present

After the American withdrawal, a series of leaders came and went, all under the control of the U.S.-trained military force, which held virtual veto power over election results. After a particularly chaotic period, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, a doctor who had served as a rural administrator of a U.S.-funded anti-yaws campaign, was elected president in 1957. Perceived as an honest and humanitarian public-health expert, as well as a proponent of black power, Duvalier initially enjoyed the support of both the Haitian army and the United States.

Instead of improving the lives of the black majority, however, Duvalier set out to build a family dictatorship by changing the constitution to solidify his power. Knowing that an independent military was a threat to his presidency, he created the elite Presidential Guard and replaced U.S.-trained officers with younger men who owed their loyalty to him. To maintain power outside the capital, he created a rural militia, commonly known in Creole as the *tonton makouts*, whose mysterious and brutal tactics terrified the population. Using corruption and intimidation, he created a new elite of his own; many of the old elite were either co-opted or eliminated, although some managed to emigrate. In 1964, Duvalier declared himself President-for-Life.

Duvalier's regime was marked by terror, corruption, and extremes of wealth and poverty. At one point, his blatant misappropriation of aid money angered the Kennedy administration into suspending aid. After Kennedy's death, however, U.S. aid

and support for Duvalier continued because of the regime's anti-communist stand and Haiti's strategic location near communist-led Cuba.

Naming his 19-year-old son Jean-Claude as his successor, "Papa Doc" died in 1971. Although "Baby Doc" was not as brutal as his father nor as politically astute, he continued policies of arbitrary imprisonment and torture of perceived opponents. Corruption and poverty also continued, as did U.S. aid and support. But it was opposition from young Haitians, as well as priests and nuns angered by the poverty and suffering, which eventually led to Duvalier's downfall. Encouraged by a grass-roots church movement, anti-government protests swept through Haiti in 1985. Alarmed as people took to the streets, the United States withdrew its aid and support and arranged for Duvalier to step down. After hastily naming a National Council of Government made up of former military supporters, Jean-Claude fled in 1986.

Although "Baby Doc" was not as brutal as his father nor as politically astute, he continued policies of arbitrary imprisonment and torture of perceived opponents.

"Duvalierism," however, continued. Conditions for the masses did not improve. On election day in November 1987, Haitians were killed at polling stations by soldiers and former *tonton makouts*. But the opposition movement could not be quashed; from a small church in a slum emerged a parish priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who preached about the need for a *lavalas*, a flood to cleanse the country of corruption and make it new. His church was burned to the ground, but his message captured the spirit of the oppressed masses. He was elected president in December 1990, but the underlying structure of the society and its long tradition of violence, control, and retribution had not changed. There continued to be strong and sometimes violent opposition to Aristide and his followers. Aristide at times used very strong rhetoric, which has been interpreted by some as encouraging violence against the rich and the opposition; he also reportedly sought to oust the military and control the judiciary. The military and the wealthy, however, still wielded power, and in September 1991, the army staged a coup d'etat, forcing Aristide into exile.

The opposition movement could not be quashed; from a small church in a slum emerged a parish priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

After Aristide's departure, many Haitians fled the island nation, some for economic reasons, others in fear for their lives. Conditions were quickly reaching a crisis state in all sectors. The U.S. policy of interdiction at sea did not seem to stem the flow. The Governors Island Accord of 1993, in which General Raoul Cédras agreed to step down in preparation for Aristide's return, was not honored. The United States then applied pressure in the

form of a trade embargo, making life intolerable for the majority of Haitians. After threats of a U.S. invasion, a U.S. negotiating team persuaded the military leadership to step aside so that the democratically-elected Aristide could return to his rightful position. To ensure stability, U.S. military troops were sent to Haiti as a peacekeeping force. The military leaders went into exile, and on October 15, 1994, Aristide returned to power to begin the long, arduous task of rebuilding Haiti.

Education

Haiti's first schools were established shortly after the Constitution of 1805, which mandated free and compulsory primary education. The Education Act of 1848 created rural primary schools with a limited, mostly agricultural curriculum. But while education has been promoted, at least in principle, by Haiti's post-colonial leaders, a comprehensive, accessible school system never developed. Even today, the majority of Haitians receive no formal education, and only a small minority are educated beyond primary school.

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The signing of the Concordat with the Vatican in 1860 brought much of the education in Haiti under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. French religious orders were assigned the responsibility of establishing and maintaining Catholic schools, which became non-secular public schools. The new teachers, mostly French clergy, were supported by the Church, while all other costs were borne by the Haitian government.

Not surprisingly, these clerics promoted an attachment to France and a respect for all that was French. At the same time, they emphasized the backwardness of all that was Haitian and denigrated Haitian capacity for self-rule. Since the urban elite had the most access to education—few priests went to rural areas to educate peasants—this attitude served to widen the social gap between the upper and lower classes.

Modeled on the French system, the Haitian education system followed a classical curriculum, emphasizing literature (later rural schools, while maintaining elements of a classical curriculum, focused on vocational education and agronomy). This curriculum remained basically unchanged until the education reform of 1978.

As in France, the school cycle consisted of 14 years of education: seven at the elementary level and seven at the secondary level. Elementary, or primary, education began with kindergarten and continued through preparatory, elementary, and

intermediate cycles, each of which lasted two years. Upon completion of the six years, a student received a Primary Education Certificate (CEP). The student could then take examinations for admission to secondary school, and upon passing the exam, enter either a *lycée* (a public school) or a *collège* (a private school). Secondary education consisted of seven years of instruction: a three-year lower cycle and a four-year upper cycle. Even though students at the lower secondary level had to select a specialization—humanities, sciences, or a combination—the upper curriculum stressed the classics and the arts. Education at the secondary level was rigorous and usually of high quality. During the first few years students averaged 20–24 hours per week of instruction; this increased to a total of 30–35 hours in the last two years. Successful completion of secondary school led to the *baccalauréat*; however, only successful completion of the *classe de philosophie* (the second part of the *baccalauréat*) qualified the student for admission to university.

One major change was the use of Haitian Creole as the language of instruction in the first four grades.

Education Reform

In recent years, there have been efforts to reform Haiti's educational system to make education more accessible to the poor and more relevant to their needs. The reforms, however, have been only partly successful at best, and much of the old system remains in place throughout the country.

Efforts to change the system began in the late 1970s. In 1978, primary schools, both urban and rural, were merged under the auspices of the National Department of Education (DEN). The education system was then restructured: ten years of basic education, consisting of three cycles (4-3-3 years), and three years of secondary education. Curriculum and materials were also changed. One major change was the use of Haitian Creole as the language of instruction in the first four grades. Other instructional innovations were grouping children by ability and an emphasis on discovery learning rather than on memorization.

By 1981, primary school enrollment in urban areas had more than doubled from 1970 figures. School nutrition programs and support from private development agencies contributed to the increased enrollment, but rural enrollments continued to be low. Moreover, dropout rates remained high: 50% in urban areas, and as high as 80% in rural areas.

Despite the reforms, obtaining an education in Haiti remains

an elusive goal for most. Though education is highly valued, the majority of Haitians do not have access to it. As of 1982, more than 65% of the population over the age of ten had received no formal education at all, and only 8% of the population had received more than a primary education. Even though education is technically free in Haiti, it remains beyond the means of most Haitians, who cannot afford the supplemental fees, school supplies, and uniforms required. Reform measures, especially the use of Haitian Creole, has met resistance. Thus, education remains a privilege of the upper and middle classes, with fluency in French a marker of success. Although plans for further implementation of reforms have not been abandoned, the current economic and political crises in Haiti have overshadowed educational concerns.

As a sign of respect, Haitian students do not look their teachers in the eye, but keep their heads down in deference.

Implications for the American Practitioner

Students who have participated in the Haitian educational system will exhibit different behaviors and certainly have values and expectations different from their American counterparts. A major difference between the two educational systems is in styles of teaching and learning. The Haitian curriculum requires learning many subjects in detail. Rote learning and memorization are the norm. Haitian students will not be used to the analysis and synthesis that U.S. teachers expect of their students; they will also be puzzled by the number of right answers that are sometimes possible. Haitian students must be overtly taught that thinking for oneself is highly valued in American schools.

Grading and testing are very strict and formal in Haiti; it is much more difficult to attain a grade of *B* (or its equivalent) in Haiti than it is in the United States. Therefore, Haitian students may tend to attach great importance to grades and tests, even quizzes. The notion that what one learns is more important than the grade one earns will be very confusing to a Haitian student.

Haitian students may also be disturbed by the informal teacher–student relationship in the United States, and may perceive this informality as a lack of respect. In Haiti the teacher addresses all students by their last names and has total authority over the class. A student speaks only when asked a question. As a sign of respect, Haitian students do not look their teachers in the eye, but keep their heads down in deference. American teachers should not be misled by this body language; Haitian students need to be taught that Americans value eye contact. By the same token, Haitian

students may sometimes overstep the boundaries of informal behavior that they are trying to learn from their classmates and teachers; this should be tolerated as part of the learning process.

Since in Haiti there are no PTAs and parents are not routinely asked or encouraged to participate in school matters and decisions, Haitian parents are also often confused by the amount of parental involvement that is expected by the schools in the United States. They feel that "teachers know best." In Haiti, if a parent is called to school, it generally means that the child has committed a great transgression; as a result, Haitian parents may react negatively or fearfully to a request for a routine parent–teacher conference. Haitian parents, like their offspring, also need to be gently educated as to what is expected of them.

Language and Literacy

It was only in 1987 that the Constitution granted official status to Creole.

The two official languages of Haiti are French and Haitian Creole. All Haitians speak Haitian Creole, while only about 10% of the population can be considered bilingual in French and Haitian Creole. More than half of this 10% is less than fluent in French. About 90% of the population speaks Haitian Creole only.

Traditionally, the two languages served different functions, with Haitian Creole the informal everyday language of all the people, regardless of social class, and French the language of formal situations: schools, newspapers, the law and the courts, and official documents and decrees. However, because the vast majority of Haitians speak only Creole, there have been efforts in recent years to expand its uses. In 1979, a law was passed that permitted Creole to be the language of instruction, and the Constitution of 1983 gave Creole the status of a national language. However, it was only in 1987 that the Constitution granted official status to Creole.

Attitudes toward French and Haitian Creole have been slow to change, however. Ever since colonial times, fluency in French has served as an indicator of social class. Since only whites and educated mulatto freedmen spoke French in colonial times, knowledge of French became the distinguishing trait between those who had been free before the Revolution and those who had only recently acquired freedom; and it ensured the superior status of the mulattos.

Although Haitians of all classes take pride in their native language as a means of expression, many have built a mystique

around French and perpetuated the myth of Haitian Creole as a nonlanguage which has no rules. Thus it is not surprising that almost all Haitian refugees will claim to be able to speak French (even if they don't). In addition, there is still great controversy in Haiti over using Haitian Creole (and teaching Haitian Creole literacy) in schools; the U.S. counterpart of this controvery is evident in the stance of some Haitians against bilingual Haitian Creole programs in their local schools.

What is "Creole"?

Traditionally, the name used to refer to the language spoken in Haiti is Creole, or *kreyòl*, as the word is written and pronounced by native speakers. However, some intellectuals have recently begun to use the term *ayisyen* (Haitian), not only to distinguish it from the generic term "creole," which refers to a number of languages, but also as a symbol of national identity. Nevertheless, in this guide we are following tradition and use the term Creole or Haitian Creole.

A creole language is not just a simplified form of a given language, but a full-fledged language that is capable of serving all the intellectual, psychological, and social needs of its speakers.

The term "creole" derives from the Portuguese word *crioulo*, meaning a person of European ancestry born and raised abroad. A creole language is a natural language that arises from languages in contact with one another and is directly related to a pidgin. Commonly viewed as a trade language, a pidgin is a simplification of a base language, with generous contributions from other languages, used to fulfill special, but temporary, communication needs. Pidgins have been used by sailors, traders, and pirates. They are native to no one; in other words, no one speaks a pidgin as a first language. Since a pidgin is used only for certain kinds of communication, it is restricted in form and usage. However, when a pidgin becomes the native language of an individual (and subsequently, many individuals who form a speech community), a creole language is born.

Although creole languages are often regarded negatively because of their relation to pidgins, it is important to note that a creole language is not just a simplified form of a given language, but a full-fledged language that is capable of serving all the intellectual, psychological, and social needs of its speakers. There are many creole languages in use around the world, such as Afrikaans (a Dutch-based creole language); Neo-Melanesian (an English-based creole language); Chamorro (often regarded as a

Spanish-based creole language); and a number of French-based creole languages.

Linguists do not agree on the origins of the various creole languages found around the world, and this is certainly the case with Haitian Creole. Some believe that it emerged from a Romance-based pidgin (Afro-Portuguese), used by sailors, slaves, and slave traders who came in contact with the nonstandard, 17th century French of the first settlers. Others believe that Haitian Creole is a derivative of a pidgin spoken by Portuguese and French sailors in the 15th and 16th centuries, and that its history predates the settlement of Haiti. In any case, it is important to remember that French and Haitian Creole are two distinct languages, and not varieties of the same language. Haitian Creole grammar (or syntax) has strong characteristics of African languages, while its vocabulary is mostly of French origin, with contributions from Spanish, African languages, and, much later, English.

Attempts to write Haitian Creole date back to the 18th century, but because of its low status in Haiti, until recently there has been little interest in writing anything but French.

Literacy in Haiti

According to the 1982 census in Haiti, more than 60% of the adult population is illiterate, and the rate of illiteracy is even higher in rural areas. Unfortunately, the census failed to record the degree of literacy and the language(s) in which the population was literate. Although school enrollment has consistently increased since the 1970s, only about 40% of children in the compulsory school-age group (7–13) are enrolled in primary school. This rate is higher in Port-au-Prince and much lower in outlying rural areas. In the rural areas, students' educations are often interrupted during the harvest and rainy seasons.

Attempts to write Haitian Creole date back to the 18th century, but because of its low status in Haiti, until recently there has been little interest in writing anything but French. The first systematic orthography was developed in the 1940s by an Irish Methodist minister, Ormande McConnell, and the American literacy specialist Frank Laubach. This writing system was based on the International Phonetic Alphabet and represented the sounds of the language in a way that is independent of French. In the 1950s, two Haitians, Charles-Fernand Pressoir and Lelio Faublas, philologist and educator, respectively, modified the McConnell–Laubach spelling to include changes that were more closely related to French. The Faublas–Pressoir orthography remained the accepted system of writing Haitian

Creole until 1975. At that time, the National Pedagogic Institute (IPN), in preparation for the reform program that later introduced Haitian Creole in the schools, developed an orthography that included elements of the two systems previously in use. This spelling system was given formal recognition by the Haitian government in 1979. Today, most Haitian language materials in Haiti and in U.S. Haitian communities use the IPN orthography, which employs a consistent, one sound–one symbol correspondence.

Despite recent developments, major obstacles remain in helping the masses in Haiti achieve literacy. Although experts agree that it is easier to become literate in one's first language, implementation of the education reform has been slow. Many sectors of the population do not see the value of becoming literate in Creole. This attitude is even found among the poor, who tend to view education as a means of escaping poverty rather than as a means for learning; as a result, they are especially concerned that their children learn French. While the reform had sought to make Haitian Creole the language of all primary grades, the government was forced under pressure to limit its use to the first four grades only. Other obstacles to Haitian Creole literacy are its lack of a body of literature, the small (but growing) number of textbooks in Creole, and the lack of teachers both willing and trained to teach Creole literacy.

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Health and Health Services

The poverty in Haiti is reflected in the health statistics of its population. The infant mortality rate is the highest in the Americas, and life expectancy, at approximately 52 years, is the lowest in the Caribbean. Since Haiti has the second-lowest per capita caloric intake in the world, malnutrition is widespread, especially among the young and the poor.

The population is afflicted by a number of infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, parasitic infections, and malaria, since a majority of the people live in malarial areas. Poor sanitation obviously contributes to these illnesses. In 1984, less than 20% of the population had toilets, and only one-fourth of the rural population had access to potable water.

In 1982, the United States Centers for Disease Control mistakenly classified Haitians as a high-risk group for AIDS, in part because early studies wrongly suggested that the disease originated in Haiti. Indeed, some have suggested that AIDS in Haiti

could be traced back to tourism in the 1970s. At that time, cheap vacation packages brought pleasure-seeking tourists to Haiti, stimulating the growth of prostitution as well as sexually-transmitted diseases. Although the high-risk classification was dropped in 1985, many Haitians in the U.S. had already become the victims of AIDS hysteria; some lost their jobs. While the exact number of people infected with HIV in Haiti is unknown, the disease has mostly affected the heterosexual population.

Another factor contributing to poor health conditions is the lack of medical services. Political repression has caused a "brain drain," and many of those who emigrated were doctors. The few doctors remaining in Haiti are mainly located in the capital, where they tend to cater to the elite who can afford their services. Religious and social service agencies have established clinics, but the number of people who require services cannot be accommodated. Rural areas are especially lacking in health services because of the poor infrastructure.

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Given the lack of modern, professional health services, it is not surprising that many of the people rely on traditional herbal remedies and religious healers to diagnose and treat illnesses.

Family Life

Haitians place great importance on family life. In rural areas, the extended family has traditionally been the social unit. However, deteriorating economic conditions, which brought many peasants to the cities in search of work, have caused a shift in society: The nuclear family has replaced the extended family in certain urban areas. But family ties remain close, and family members tend to be supportive of one another; intergenerational conflicts are rare, but increasing because of urbanization and efforts to identify with the world at large.

Men and women play complementary roles, generally sharing household and financial responsibilties. Women assist in farmwork, performing such tasks as weeding and harvesting. At home, women are generally responsible for childcare and the daily household tasks, while men do heavy chores, such as gathering firewood.

In general, Haitian women have been more active in the labor force than women in other Latin American countries, perhaps because the rewards for their labor are greater. In the coffee industry, marketers (persons who transport coffee beans to local and urban markets to sell) are almost exclusively female; they are

known as "Madam Saras." Income earned from agricultural production belongs to both husband and wife, but income earned from nonfarm business activities does not have to be shared with the husband, and, as a result, many women are economically independent.

The most common form of marriage among the lower classes is known as *plasaj*, a kind of common-law marriage. Although the government does not recognize *plasaj* as legitimate, this relationship is considered normal and proper among the poor. Although the upper class may say they disapprove of the practice, many men of the elite have children by mistresses and provide financial support for their second "family." Thus, *plasaj*, in one form or another, is practiced by 85% of the Haitian population.

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A man or woman may have a number of *plasaj* relationships in a lifetime. Children born from one *plasaj* relationship regard offspring from another *plasaj* as brothers and sisters and often live in the same household without conflict. If parents separate, a child may take either the father's or mother's last name.

Haitians value both their family reputation and their children, and take pains to ensure that all children receive equal inheritances. Children are considered a gift from God, and are treated accordingly. Children also provide security in old age.

Religion

The Haitian population is 80% Roman Catholic; Protestants of various denominations account for the other 20%. Yet voodoo may be considered the national religion of Haiti, since most Haitians practice at least some aspect of voodoo or are affected by the religion in some way.

Popular misconceptions about voodoo have created a negative stereotype about both its practices and its adherents. Depicted in books and movies as a cult of sorcerers who practice "black magic," voodoo is in fact a religion based on family spirits who generally help and protect. Although lacking a fixed theology and an organized hierarchy, voodoo is a religion with its own rituals, ceremonies, and altars that practitioners do not find to be at odds with Roman Catholicism. In fact, many Roman Catholic symbols and prayers have blended with voodoo rituals and traditions to make for a unique and typically Haitian religion. For example, pictures of Catholic saints are painted on the walls of temples to represent the voodoo spirits; at funerals, it is not uncommon that

voodoo ceremonies and rituals be performed for family members first, followed by a more public traditional Roman Catholic ceremony presided over by a priest.

Voodoo is derived from a synthesis of African religious beliefs. The word *voodoo* comes from the Fon language of Benin (formerly Dahomey) in West Africa and means "spirit." When Africans of various tribes were brought to Haiti as slaves, they brought with them their beliefs in spirits who acted as intermediaries with a single God Almighty; some of these spirits were ancestors of the living, while others represented human emotions and forces of nature. In time, a system of beliefs and spirits unique to the slaves in Haiti was formed. These spirits, or *loas*, are inherited or bought by families and can be called upon for help; they can be paid to bring good fortune and protect, or to attack enemies. Payment is usually in the form of food, drink, or other gifts offered during rituals.

The word voodoo *comes from the Fon language of Benin (formerly Dahomey) in West Africa and means "spirit."*

During colonial times, and even after, there was a great effort to Christianize the Africans. While it was often to the advantage of the slaves and mulattos to succumb to this pressure, they could not face spiritual enslavement as well. Voodoo helped them survive slavery; it became a religion of tolerance that kept alive old African beliefs while borrowing freely from Christianity. Thus the curious mix of Roman Catholicism and voodooism as practiced by Haitians represents a triumph of the people.

It should be noted that the Roman Catholic clergy, although opposed to voodoo, have had a more benign view of it than Protestants, who see the religion as diabolical, possibly because voodoo beliefs do not foster individual responsibility for actions. Voodooists attribute the good as well as the bad to the spirits.

Culture: Arts and Cultural Values

Haiti's uniqueness is reflected in the originality of its paintings, music, and literature. Artists and musicians, drawing from the rich folklife and vitality of the people, have created internationally-recognized works and sounds. Haitian paintings of the "naive" or "primitive" school have long been recognized around the world; works by more famous artists have been exhibited in galleries and museums in the United States and France. Handicrafts such as wood carvings and tapestries also employ this primitive style. Haitian music, like Haiti itself, is an original blend, containing elements of African drum rhythms and European dance music.

Haiti has also produced writers, poets, and essayists of international standing. Haitian literature has been written almost exclusively in French; however, with the recognition of Creole as an official language, novels, poems, and plays are being written increasingly in Creole. In 1975, the first novel to be written entirely in Haitian Creole was published; *Dézafi* by Frankétienne poetically depicts Haitian life.

The expressiveness of the Haitian people is evident in their rich oral tradition, which includes storytelling, proverbs, riddles, songs and games. Storytelling in Haiti is a performance art. The storyteller uses a different voice for each character in the story, and may sing songs as part of the narrative.

Many Haitian values are similar to traditional, conservative American values. Haitians value community cooperation and usually have close extended-family ties. Many are religious and have a strong work ethic as well as a deep respect for authority and societal laws. Education is particulary important, since it is a means of social mobility.

Storytelling in Haiti is a performance art. The storyteller uses a different voice for each character in the story, and may sing songs as part of the narrative.

Significant Holidays

Independence Day	January 1st
Forefather's Day	January 2nd
Carnaval (2 days before Ash Wednesday)	February or March
Good Friday	2 days before Easter
Easter Sunday	April (usually)
Pan American Day	April 14th
Labor Day	May 1st
Flag Day	May 18th
Day of Assumption	August 15th
Anniversary of Dessaline's Death	October 17th
All Saints Day	November 1st
All Souls Day	November 2nd
Anniversary of the Victory of Vertières*	November 18th
Anniversary of the "Discovery" of Haiti	December 5th
Christmas Eve	December 24th
Christmas Day	December 25th
New Year's Eve	December 31st

* a battle fought in 1803 during the struggle for independence

Some Haitian Proverbs

Mwen ba w sal w ap mande salon.
I give you a room and now you want my living room.

Dan pouri gen fòs sou bannann mi.
Rotten teeth are strong on ripe bananas.

Fè koupe fè.
Iron cuts iron.

Bouch manje tout manje, men li pa pale tout pawòl.
The mouth may eat any food but should not speak on any subject. (Discretion is important.)

Yon sèl dwèt pa manje kalalou.
You cannot eat okra with one finger.
(We must all cooperate.)

Chay soti sout tèt, tonbe sou zèpòl.
The load goes from the head to the shoulder.
(Problems go from bad to worse.)

Gras a diri, ti wòch goute grès.
Thanks to the rice, the pebble tastes of grease.
(Good things rub off.)

Bon kòk chante nan tout poulaye.
A good cock sings to all his chickens.
(A good person is sought after by everyone.)

Byen pre pa lakay.
Being close by doesn't mean you're home.
(Being close to wealth doesn't make you rich.)

Haitian Creole

The Sound System (Phonology)

It is difficult to give a standard description of the Haitian Creole phonological system; linguists do not agree on a phonological analysis of Haitian Creole, probably because there is so much regional variation in pronunciation. As a rule, the pronunciation of monolingual Creole speakers is taken as a standard. There is variation between North and South, however, and Port-au-Prince pronunciation (especially of vowels) tends to be more like French, since most of the bilingual Haitian Creole–French speakers live there.

Since English has also borrowed many words from French, the sound systems of Haitian Creole and English share many similarities. Therefore, Haitians learning English should not have overwhelming problems with the pronunciation of individual words. Basically, Haitian Creole only lacks the */th/* sounds in "thick" and "the," the */i/* sound in "pin," the */a/* sound in "hat," and the */r/* sound in "row." It contains, however, other sounds (e.g., nasals) that do not exist in English.

Haitians learning English should not have overwhelming problems with the pronunciation of individual words.

• Vowels

Haitian Creole has ten vowels and three semi-vowels. The following list contains a phonemic description and examples in Creole and English where appropriate. In the recent standardization of Creole orthography, great effort was made to make the sound–symbol correspondence consistent for ease in the acquisition of literacy skills. In other words, each sound is consistently represented by the same written symbol (i.e., letter or group of letters). The written equivalent for each sound is noted in bold letters.

	HC	**English**
/ i /	*diri*	s**ee**
/ e /	*bebe*	m**a**te
/ ɛ /	*bèbè*	g**e**t
/ ɛ̃ /	*benyen*	—
/ a /	*papa*	h**o**t
/ ã /	*manman*	—
/ u /	*moumou*	f**oo**d
/ o /	*bobo*	ph**o**to
/ ɔ /	*bòzò*	**ou**ght
/ õ /	*bonbon*	—
/ wi /	*uit*	—
/ w /	*wi*	**w**in
/ y /	*Ayiti*	**y**ou

• **Consonants**

There are seventeen consonant sounds in Haitian Creole. For many of the sounds described there may be variants. Common variants are marked (*).

	HC	**English**
/ p /	**p**è (father)	**p**en
/ b /	ta**b** (table)	**b**owl
/ f /	**f**i (daughter)	**f**ive
/ v /	**v**wa (voice)	**v**et
/ m /	**m**oun (someone)	**m**at
/ t /	**t**ab (table)	**t**oast
/ d /	**d**lo (water)	**d**ate
/ s /	**s**oley (sun)	**s**oul
/ z /	**z**o (bone)	**z**ipper
/ n /*	**n**ò (north)	**n**ow
/ l /	**l**ènn (wool)	**l**ife
/ r /*	ma**r**i (husband)	**r**at
/ ǰ /*	**j**anm (never)	a**g**ile
/ š /	**ch**èn (dog)	**Ch**icago
/ k /	la**k**ay (home)	**c**at
/ g /	**g**ras (thanks)	**g**ar**g**oyle
/ h /*	**h**adi	**h**and

*/n/ in final position often nasalizes the preceding vowel.

*/r/ in Haitian Creole is not pronounced like English /r/ at all. Before rounded vowels it is pronounced [w] and is written that way, e.g., *wouj* 'red'. In other cases it is pronounced as a velar [ɣ].

*/j/ is sometimes pronounced like the French /ž/.

*/h/ exists only in the Creole spoken in southern Haiti; otherwise it is not a part of the phonological system.

Basic Grammatical Structures (Syntax)

It is neither possible nor desirable to describe all the grammatical structures of Haitian Creole here. Therefore, we have chosen to explain a few basics and to illustrate their divergence from French and English.

• Word Order

Word Order in Haitian Creole, like English, generally follows the **S**ubject–**V**erb–**O**bject pattern. This order is evident in affirmative and negative sentences as well as in questions (i.e., interrogatives).

Jan pran pòtre.	John takes pictures.
S V O	S V O
Jan pa pran pòtre.	John doesn't take pictures.
S neg V O	S neg V O
Eske Jan (pa) pran pòtre?	Does (n't) John take pictures?
? S (neg) V O	? (neg) S V O

• Nouns

Nouns in Haitian Creole, unlike those in French, are not marked for gender or number. In other words, there is no grammatical distinction, such as ***le*** *soleil* ('the sun', masculine) vs. ***la*** *lune* ('the moon', feminine), which occurs in French. There is also no plural *-s* ending, which occurs in both French and English.

Haitian Creole expresses the concepts of gender and plural by using specific words. For example:

frè (brother) vs. *sè* (sister)
kek *liv* (some books)

• Pronouns

The system of pronouns in Haitian Creole is quite simple in comparison with French and English. There is only a single form that is used for subject, object, and possessive. The pronouns, however, may occur in a full or contracted form.

Full	**Contracted**	
mwen	*m*	I, me, my
ou	*w*	you, your
li	*l*	he, him, his, she, her, it, its
nou	*n*	we, us, our, you, your (pl.)
yo	*y**	they, them, their
M *achte anpil liv.*	**I** bought many books.	
Jina rèlè ***m****.*	Gina called **me**.	
Papa ***m*** *chita kote* ***li****.*	**My** father is sitting next to **him/her/it**.	

*This contraction rarely occurs in written form.

• **Articles**

Haitian Creole has both definite and indefinite articles, as do French and English. However, there are some differences in placement, form, and usage. The definite article has both a singular and a plural form, and always follows the noun. Because the singular definite article is phonologically determined by the sound of the preceding element, it exhibits a variety of forms.

tab la	the table	***mont lan***	the watch
kay la	the house	***vant lan***	the belly
dam nan	the lady	***radyo a***	the radio
timoun nan	the child	***biwo a***	the desk
ban an	the bench	***kamyon an***	the truck

The plural definite article has one invariant form: *yo*.

tab yo	the tables

The indefinite article *yon* always precedes the noun. An alternate form *on* is often used more informally.

yon (on) *mont*	a watch	***yon (on)*** *tab*	a table

• **Verbs**

The verb system in Haitian Creole is quite different from those in French and English. There is no subject-verb agreement, and there are no verb tenses per se. Instead, Haitian Creole uses a system of markers or short particles, which precede the verb, to indicate tense. For example, the particle *te* indicates past tense, *ap* indicates progressive, and *pral(e)* indicates future. The verb with no marker may indicate simple present tense or immediate past tense. Some examples follow.

Jan ***ranmase*** *liv yo.*	John **collects** the books.
Jan ak Gabi ***ranmase*** *liv yo.*	John and Gaby **collect** books.
Li ***te*** *marye mwa pase.*	She **got** married last month.
Jina ***ap*** *monte bisiklèt.*	Gina **is** rid**ing** a bicycle.
Janin ak Silvya ***pral*** *chante pita.*	Janine and Sylvia **are going to** sing later.

Vocabulary (Lexicon)

The lexicon of Haitian Creole is derived primarily (90%) from French. This word-base, however, has been enriched with borrowings from other languages with which Haitian Creole speakers historically had contact. For example:

Words of Caribbean origin

kannari	(earthen jar)
sanba	(poet, musician)

Words of African origin

oungan	(voodoo priest)
zonbi	(ghost)

Words of Spanish origin

abladò	(talker)
sapat	(sandal)

Words of English origin

bokit	(bucket)

Words of French origin

As for the words derived from French, it is important to note that they have been modified in a variety of ways. A great number have undergone phonological changes, since the Creole sound system is not the same as the French system. In other cases, the meanings of the words have changed, sometimes by either extending or restricting the semantic field (i.e., the meanings of the words). Some examples follow.

Examples of Haitian Creole words derived from French which

• drop the first syllable:

HC: *rive*	Fr: *arriver*
HC: *kajou*	Fr: *acajou*

• fuse the noun with a determiner:

HC: *dlo*	Fr: *de l'eau*
HC: *monnonk*	Fr: *mon oncle*

• incorporate a vowel change:

HC: *kalkil*	Fr: *calcul*
HC: *kirye*	Fr: *curieux*

• drop the *-r*:

HC: *pòt*	Fr: *porte*
HC: *siga*	Fr: *cigare*

As French words entered Haitian Creole, some acquired different meanings:

• *kriye*	HC: to weep	Fr: to scream, shout
• *bonbon*	HC: all sweets (cake)	Fr: candy
• *boutik*	HC: mom & pop store	Fr: small (exclusive) store
• *kabare*	HC: cafeteria tray	Fr: night club

There are also Haitian Creole words that have retained the 18th century French pronunciation. This phenomenon can also be observed in Canadian French.

• *frèt* (cold)
• *bout* (extremity)

Conclusion

The Haitian community has made gains particularly in immigration issues: There has been significant legislation passed to resolve the uncertain legal status of many Haitian refugees.

The Haitian communities in the United States, particularly in South Florida, Boston, and the New York metropolitan area, have successfully established themselves as socially, economically, and culturally vibrant communities that enrich the country's multicultural character. The Haitian community that originally settled in Miami's Little Haiti has progressed economically at such a significant rate that it has become a transitional place where recent arrivals and Haitians of lesser means settle temporarily until they become economically self-sufficient. This community was recently honored when the Dade County School Board named an elementary school located in the heart of Little Haiti after Toussaint Louverture, the precursor of Haitian independence.

Haitians have come a long way since the early 1970s. The Haitian community has made gains particularly in immigration issues: There has been significant legislation passed to resolve the uncertain legal status of many Haitian refugees. Many Haitians have demonstrated their willingness and ability to become self-sufficient and enter the mainstream of urban and suburban U.S. communities. They have become citizens and their votes are courted.

Neverthless, there is much to overcome. Negative stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings continue, and many Haitian-American youngsters lack a sense of ethnic pride because of the negative publicity related to the political turmoil that hinders Haiti's chances to progress socially and economically. This lack of ethnic pride is often manifested in ethnic misidentification: Young Haitians present themselves at various times as African-

Americans, Caribbean-Americans, West-Indians, or Haitian-Americans, depending on the current sociopolitical climate in both Haiti and the United States. Many Haitians still face severe problems such as unemployment, inadequate housing, insufficient health care, lack of skills, and difficulty in English. These social ills, however, are not exclusive to the Haitian community, but are problems of many other poor communities. Most of these problems will be overcome with time. Just as other immigrant groups have overcome their difficulties in this country, so too will the Haitians.

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